Chapter 5

Protect and Enhance Coastal Resources; Ensure Proper Management and Access for the Benefit of Current and Future Generations

Many people associate South Carolina with its coast. In addition to pristine ecosystems and native species, much of the state's economy has some connection to its coastal resources. Millions of tourists visit the coast annually, and the state's eight coastal counties are experiencing rampant development. With that development comes a responsibility to ensure access to our coastal resources while protecting and maintaining them for future generations.

Council on Coastal Futures sets priorities

The Council on Coastal Futures is a 19-member advisory committee to the DHEC board whose mission is to document priority issues and concerns relating to coastal zone management and recommend actions, programs and measures to improve the effectiveness of the S.C. Coastal Zone Management Program. Numerous stakeholder groups nominated representatives to serve on the council. Appointees then were selected based on a goal of creating a balanced and diverse group of individuals that represented a broad spectrum of constituents with interests in coastal issues. The council first met in December 2002 and will continue to meet monthly until March 2004, with a final report due to the DHEC board by May 2004.

Coastal issues and concerns were prioritized through interviews with former DHEC Ocean and Coastal Resource Management staff and board members, a survey of members of stakeholder groups, and interviews with the general public. Council took the input from those assessments and established three priorities:

- permit processing issues;
- local government assistance, particularly in the areas of stormwater management and growth/development issues; and
- resource management issues (isolated wetlands, beach management, etc.).

The public, stakeholders and experts have been invited to speak to the council and provide recommendations for the council to consider. Currently, the council is finalizing discussions of issues to be included in its report. Some issues addressed so far include intra-DHEC coordination to improve the permitting process and shorten review time; providing assistance to local governments on stormwater

best management practices, beachfront issues, and wetland management; public beach access and beach renourishment funding; and a long-term vision for the coast.

Local governments provided management tools through Special Area Management Plans (SAMPs)

DHEC's Ocean and Coastal Resource Management has worked on several Special Area Management Plans (SAMPs), which are joint undertakings with local governments and state agencies to coordinate long-term water quality objectives for drainage subbasins.

Beaufort SAMP provides water quality guidance

Initiated at the request of a citizens group that had become alarmed at shellfish bed closures in the county, the Beaufort County SAMP was a cooperative undertaking between DHEC and the county that was funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. There were 10 work elements of the SAMP, which fell under five headings: stormwater management, wastewater management, water quality monitoring, boating management, and public education. The SAMP funded the establishment of a stormwater utility, a watershed-level stormwater management plan for the Okatie Basin, the development of treatment standards for bridge and road runoff, and a water quality monitoring report. In addition, the SAMP developed a boating management plan and a comprehensive on-site disposal system (septic tank) program and conducted an educational campaign to inform the public

of the importance of land use activities and water quality. If adopted by Beaufort County Council and approved by the DHEC board, this document will provide guidance on a number of issues that will affect water quality in the county.

Georgetown SAMP seeks safe development

In May 1987, the City of Georgetown and the then-S.C. Coastal Council completed work on a SAMP for the waterfront district between Orange and Screven streets. The purpose was to propose land development patterns and construction policies that could be used in future years to guarantee that the Georgetown downtown waterfront area develops in an environmentally sensitive way. In addition, the SAMP had several objectives, including making the waterfront accessible to encourage the redevelopment of private properties and assuring that private and public undertakings are done in a manner that will protect both the natural and human environments.

Since 1987, many structures have been built in accordance with the SAMP, and the downtown streetscape has undergone a complete redesign. Because of the positive results from the original SAMP, the city worked with DHEC to expand the boundaries of the area covered by the SAMP.

Berkeley County SAMP ensures protection

The development of a SAMP in Berkeley County, the Upper Cooper River Corridor Plan, presents an opportunity to implement 13 recommendations from the earlier Charleston Harbor Project (CHP) SAMP, which focused on three primary issues: cultural resource management, water management, and land and habitat management. The Cooper River Corridor in Berkeley County is a uniquely important area from historical, natural resource and economic perspectives. The need to balance the multiple uses of this area and limit potential conflict is very important to Berkeley County officials, local landowners and other stakeholders in the area. Recommendations in the CHP SAMP were developed to ensure that the multiple uses of the area be protected and maintained. Through the efforts of participants in the Berkeley County Upper Cooper River Corridor Plan, it will be possible to protect several federally endangered species as well as several historically important properties. This project is a good example of federal, state and local governments working together to plan for the future growth of an area while protecting valuable resources.

Ongoing challenges, new approaches

Workshops promote low impact coastal development

In October 2003, DHEC partnered with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources to host a conference, Low Impact Development and Stormwater Management, An Integrated Design Approach, geared toward coastal developers. (A separate conference was held in the Midlands; see page 24.) Participants learned about the advantages of using low impact development measures for handling stormwater as opposed to traditional methods. These measures include on-lot bioretention, narrow streets to reduce imperviousness, and vegetated buffers. They serve to preserve environmental quality and reduce costs in development and infrastructure construction and maintenance. Developers and government officials can now use the supplied information about low impact development for future projects and stormwater ordinances.